

form of benefit only if both the optional form of benefit and any applicable condition either causing the availability of such optional form of benefit to be discriminatory or making it reasonable to expect that the availability of such optional form will be discriminatory were both adopted and in effect prior to January 30, 1986. If the preceding sentence is not satisfied with respect to an optional form of benefit, this section is effective with respect to such optional form of benefit as if the plan were a new plan.

(2) *Exception for certain amendments covered by a favorable determination letter.* If a condition causing the availability of an optional form of benefit to be discriminatory, or to be reasonably expected to discriminate, was adopted or made effective on or after January 30, 1986, and a favorable determination letter that covered such plan provision is or was received with respect to an application submitted before July 11, 1988, the effective date of this section with respect to such provision is the applicable effective date determined under the rules with respect to existing plans, as though such provision had been adopted and in effect prior to January 30, 1986.

(e) *Transitional rule effective date.* The transitional rule provided in Q&A-5 of this section is effective January 30, 1986.

[53 FR 26054, July 11, 1988, as amended by T.D. 8360, 56 FR 47536, Sept. 19, 1991; T.D. 8485, 58 FR 46778, Sept. 3, 1993; T.D. 8212, 61 FR 14247, Apr. 1, 1996]

**§ 1.401(a)-11 Qualified joint and survivor annuities.**

(a) *General rule*—(1) *Required provisions.* A trust, to which section 411 (relating to minimum vesting standards) applies without regard to section 411(e)(2), which is a part of a plan providing for the payment of benefits in any form of a life annuity (as defined in paragraph (b)(1) of this section), shall not constitute a qualified trust under section 401(a)(11) and this section unless such plan provides that:

(i) Unless the election provided in paragraph (c)(1) of this section has been made, life annuity benefits will be paid in a form having the effect of a qualified joint and survivor annuity (as

defined in paragraph (b)(2) of this section) with respect to any participant who—

(A) Begins to receive payments under such plan on or after the date the normal retirement age is attained, or

(B) Dies (on or after the date the normal retirement age is attained) while in active service of the employer maintaining the plan, or

(C) In the case of a plan which provides for the payment of benefits before the normal retirement age, begins to receive payments under such plan on or after the date the qualified early retirement age (as defined in paragraph (b)(4) of this section) is attained, or

(D) Separates from service on or after the date the normal retirement age (or the qualified early retirement age) is attained and after satisfaction of eligibility requirements for the payment of benefits under the plan (except for any plan requirement that there be filed a claim for benefits) and thereafter dies before beginning to receive life annuity benefits;

(ii) Any participant may elect, as provided in paragraph (c)(1) of this section, not to receive life annuity benefits in the form of a qualified joint and survivor annuity; and

(iii) If the plan provides for the payment of benefits before the normal retirement age, any participant may elect, as provided in paragraph (c)(2) of this section, that life annuity benefits be payable as an early survivor annuity (as defined in paragraph (b)(3) of this section) upon his death in the event that he—

(A) Attains the qualified early retirement age (as defined in paragraph (b)(4) of this section), and

(B) Dies on or before the day normal retirement age is attained while employed by an employer maintaining the plan.

(2) *Certain cash-outs.* A plan will not fail to satisfy the requirements of section 401(a)(11) and this section merely because it provides that if the present value of the entire nonforfeitable benefit derived from employer contributions of a participant at the time of his separation from service does not exceed \$1,750 (or such smaller amount as the plan may specify), such benefit will be paid to him in a lump sum.

(3) *Illustrations.* The provisions of subparagraph (1) of this paragraph may be illustrated by the following examples:

*Example (1).* The X Corporation Defined Contribution Plan was established in 1960. As in effect on January 1, 1974, the plan provided that, upon the participant's retirement, the participant may elect to receive the balance of his account in the form of (1) a single-sum cash payment, (2) a single-sum distribution consisting of X Corporation stock, (3) five equal annual cash payments, (4) a life annuity, or (5) a combination of options (1) through (4). The plan also provided that, if a participant did not elect another form of distribution, the balance of his account would be distributed to him in the form of a single-sum cash payment upon his retirement. Assume that section 401(a)(11) and this section became applicable to the plan as of its plan year beginning January 1, 1976, with respect to persons who were active participants in the plan as of such date (see paragraph (f) of this section). If X Corporation Defined Contribution Plan continues to allow the life annuity payment option after December 31, 1975, it must be amended to provide that if a participant elects a life annuity option the life annuity benefit will be paid in a form having the effect of a qualified joint and survivor annuity, except to the extent that the participant elects another form of benefit payment. However, the plan can continue to provide that, if no election is made, the balance will be paid as a single-sum cash payment. If the trust is not so amended, it will fail to qualify under section 401(a).

*Example (2).* The Corporation Retirement Plan provides that plan benefits are payable only in the form of a life annuity and also provides that a participant may retire before the normal retirement age of 65 and receive a benefit if he has completed 30 years of service. Under this plan, an employee who begins employment at the age of 18 will be eligible to receive retirement benefits at the age of 48 if he then has 30 years of service. This plan must allow a participant to elect in the time and manner prescribed in paragraph (c)(2) of this section an early survivor annuity (defined in paragraph (b)(3) of this section) to be payable on the death of the participant if death occurs while the participant is in active service for the employer maintaining the plan and on or after the date the participant reaches the qualified early retirement age of 55 (the later of the date the participant reaches the earliest retirement age (age 48) or 10 years before normal retirement age (age 55)) but before the day after the day the participant reaches normal retirement age (age 65).

*Example (3).* Assume the same facts as in Example (2). A, B, and C began employment with Y Corporation when they each attained

age 18. A retires and begins to receive benefit payments at age 48 after completing 30 years of service. The plan is not required to pay a qualified joint and survivor annuity to A and his spouse at any time. B does not elect an early survivor annuity at age 55, but retires at age 57 after completing 39 years of service. Unless B makes an election under subparagraph (1)(ii) of this paragraph, the plan is required to pay a qualified joint and survivor annuity to B and his spouse. C makes no elections described in subparagraph (1) of this paragraph, and dies while in active service at age 66 after completing 48 years of service. The plan is required to pay a qualified survivor annuity to C's spouse.

(b) *Definitions.* As used in this section—(1) *Life annuity.* (i) The term “life annuity” means an annuity that provides retirement payments and requires the survival of the participant or his spouse as one of the conditions for any payment or possible payment under the annuity. For example, annuities that make payments for 10 years or until death, whichever occurs first or whichever occurs last, are life annuities.

(ii) However, the term “life annuity” does not include an annuity, or that portion of an annuity, that provides those benefits which, under section 411(a)(9), would not be taken into account in the determination of the normal retirement benefit or early retirement benefit. For example, “social security supplements” described in the fourth sentence of section 411(a)(9) are not considered to be life annuities for the purposes of this section, whether or not an early retirement benefit is provided under the plan.

(2) *Qualified joint and survivor annuity.* The term “qualified joint and survivor annuity” means an annuity for the life of the participant with a survivor annuity for the life of his spouse which is neither (i) less than one-half of, nor (ii) greater than, the amount of the annuity payable during the joint lives of the participant and his spouse. For purposes of the preceding sentence, amounts described in § 1.401(a)-11(b)(1)(ii) may be disregarded. A qualified joint and survivor annuity must be at least the actuarial equivalent of the normal form of life annuity or, if greater, of any optional form of life annuity offered under the plan. Equivalence may be determined, on the basis of consistently applied reasonable actuarial

factors, for each participant or for all participants or reasonable groupings of participants, if such determination does not result in discrimination in favor of employees who are officers, shareholders, or highly compensated. An annuity is not a qualified joint and survivor annuity if payments to the spouse of a deceased participant are terminated, or reduced, because of such spouse's remarriage.

(3) *Early survivor annuity.* The term "early survivor annuity" means an annuity for the life of the participant's spouse the payments under which must not be less than the payments which would have been made to the spouse under the joint and survivor annuity if the participant had made the election described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section immediately prior to his retirement and if his retirement had occurred on the day before his death and within the period during which an election can be made under such paragraph (c)(2). For example, if a participant would be entitled to a single life annuity of \$100 per month or a reduced amount under a qualified joint and survivor annuity of \$80 per month, his spouse is entitled to a payment of at least \$40 per month. However, the payments may be reduced to reflect the number of months of coverage under the survivor annuity pursuant to paragraph (e) of this section.

(4) *Qualified early retirement age.* The term "qualified early retirement age" means the latest of—

(i) The earliest date, under the plan, on which the participant could elect (without regard to any requirement that approval of early retirement be obtained) to receive retirement benefits (other than disability benefits).

(ii) The first day of the 120th month beginning before the participant reaches normal retirement age, or

(iii) The date on which the participant begins participation.

(5) *Normal retirement age.* The term "normal retirement age" has the meaning set forth in section 411(a)(8).

(6) *Annuity starting date.* The term "annuity starting date" means the first day of the first period with respect to which an amount is received as a life annuity, whether by reason of retirement or by reason of disability.

(7) *Day.* The term "day" means a calendar day.

(c) *Elections—(1) Election not to take joint and survivor annuity form—(i) In general.* (A) A plan shall not be treated as satisfying the requirements of this section unless it provides that each participant may elect, during the election period described in subdivision (ii) of this subparagraph, not to receive a qualified joint and survivor annuity. However, if a plan provides that a qualified joint and survivor annuity is the only form of benefit payable under the plan with respect to a married participant, no election need be provided.

(B) The election shall be in writing and clearly indicate that the participant is electing to receive all or, if permitted by the plan, part of his benefits under the plan in a form other than that of a qualified joint and survivor annuity. A plan will not fail to meet the requirements of this section merely because the plan requires the participant to obtain the written approval of his spouse in order for the participant to make this election or if the plan provides that such approval is not required.

(ii) *Election period.* (A) For purposes of the election described in paragraph (c)(1)(i) of this section, the plan shall provide an election period which shall include a period of at least 90 days following the furnishing of all of the applicable information required by subparagraph (3)(i) of this paragraph and ending prior to commencement of benefits. In no event may the election period end earlier than the 90th day before the commencement of benefits. Thus, for example, the commencement of benefits may be delayed until the end of such election period because the amount of payments to be made to a participant cannot be ascertained before the end of such period; see § 1.401(a)-14(d).

If a participant makes a request for additional information as provided in subparagraph (3)(iii) of this paragraph on or before the last day of the election

period, the election period shall be extended to the extent necessary to include at least the 90 calendar days immediately following the day the requested additional information is personally delivered or mailed to the participant. Notwithstanding the immediately preceding sentence, a plan may provide in cases in which the participant has been furnished by mail or personal delivery all of the applicable information required by subparagraph (3)(i) of this paragraph, that a request for such additional information must be made on or before a date which is not less than 60 days from the date of such mailing or delivery; and if the plan does so provide, the election period shall be extended to the extent necessary to include at least the 60 calendar days following the day the requested additional information is personally delivered or mailed to the participant.

(B) In the case of a participant in a plan to which this subparagraph applies who separated from service after section 401(a)(11) and this section became applicable to such plan with respect to such participant, and to whom an election required by this subparagraph has not been previously made available (and will not become available in normal course), the plan must provide an election to receive the balance of his benefits (properly adjusted, if applicable, for payments received, prior to the exercise of such election, in the form of a qualified joint and survivor annuity) in a form other than that of a qualified joint and survivor annuity. The provisions of paragraph (c)(1)(ii)(A) shall apply except that in no event shall the election period end before the 90th day after the date on which notice of the availability of such election and the applicable information required by subparagraph (3)(i) of this paragraph is given directly to the participant. If such notice and information is given by mail, it shall be treated as given on the date of mailing. If such participant has died, such election shall be made available to such participant's personal representative.

(2) *Election of early survivor annuity—*  
(i) *In general.* (A) A plan described in subparagraph (a)(1)(iii) of this section shall not be treated as satisfying the

requirements of this section unless it provides that each participant may elect, during the period described in subdivision (ii) of this subparagraph, an early survivor annuity as described in paragraph (a)(1)(iii) of this section. Breaks in service after the participant has attained the qualified early retirement age neither invalidate a previous election or revocation nor prevent an election from being made or revoked during the election period.

(B) The election shall be in writing and clearly indicate that the participant is electing the early survivor annuity form.

(C) A plan is not required to provide an election under this subparagraph if—

(1) The plan provides that an early survivor annuity is the only form of benefit payable under the plan with respect to a married participant who dies while employed by an employer maintaining the plan,

(2) In the case of a defined contribution plan, the plan provides a survivor benefit at least equal in value to the vested portion of the participant's account balance, if the participant dies while in active service with an employer maintaining the plan, or

(3) In the case of a defined benefit plan, the plan provides a survivor benefit at least equal in value to the present value of the vested portion of the participant's normal form of the accrued benefit payable at normal retirement age (determined immediately prior to death), if the participant dies while in active service with an employer maintaining the plan. Any present values must be determined in accordance with either the actuarial assumptions or factors specified in the plan, or a variable standard independent of employer discretion for converting optional benefits specified in the plan.

(ii) *Election period.* (A) For purposes of the election described in paragraph (c)(2)(i) of this section the plan shall provide an election period which, except as provided in the following sentence, shall begin not later than the later of either the 90th day before a participant attains the qualified early retirement age or the date on which his participation begins, and shall end on

the date the participant terminates his employment. If such a plan contains a provision that any election made under this subparagraph does not become effective or ceases to be effective if the participant dies within a certain period beginning on the date of such election, the election period prescribed in this subdivision (ii) shall begin not later than the later of (1) a date which is 90 days plus such certain period before the participant attains the qualified early retirement age or (2) the date on which his participation begins. For example, if a plan provides that an election made under this subparagraph does not become effective if the participant dies less than 2 years after the date of such election, the period for making an election under this subparagraph must begin not later than the later of (1) 2 years and 90 days before the participant attains the qualified early retirement age, or (2) the date on which his participation begins. However, the election period for an individual who was an active participant on the date this section became effective with regard to the plan need not begin earlier than such effective date.

(B) In the case of a participant in a plan to which this subparagraph applies who dies after section 401(a)(11) and this section became applicable to such plan with respect to such participant and to whom an election required by this subparagraph has not been previously made available, the plan must give the participant's surviving spouse or, if dead, such spouse's personal representative the option of electing an early survivor annuity. The plan may reduce the surviving spouse's annuity to take into account any benefits already received. The period for making such election shall not end before the 90th day after the date on which written notice of the availability of such election and applicable information required by subparagraph (3)(i) of this paragraph is given directly to such surviving spouse or personal representative. If such notice and information is given by mail, it shall be treated as given on the date of mailing.

(3) *Information to be provided by plan.* For rules regarding the information required to be provided with respect to

the election to waive a QJSA or a QPSA, see § 1.417(a)(3)-1.

(4) *Election is revocable.* A plan to which this section applies must provide that any election made under this paragraph may be revoked in writing during the specified election period, and that after such election has been revoked, another election under this paragraph may be made during the specified election period.

(5) *Election by surviving spouse.* A plan will not fail to meet the requirements of section 401(a)(11) and this section merely because it provides that the spouse of a deceased participant may elect to have benefits paid in a form other than a survivor annuity. If the plan provides that such a spouse may make such an election, the plan administrator must furnish to this spouse, within a reasonable amount of time after a written request has been made by this spouse, a written explanation in non-technical language of the survivor annuity and any other form of payment which may be selected. This explanation must state the financial effect (in terms of dollars) of each form of payment. A plan need not respond to more than one such request.

(d) *Permissible additional plan provisions—(1) In general.* A plan will not fail to meet the requirements of section 401(a)(11) and this section merely because it contains one or more of the provisions described in paragraphs (d)(2) through (5) of this section.

(2) *Claim for benefits.* A plan may provide that as a condition precedent to the payment of benefits, a participant must express in writing to the plan administrator the form in which he prefers benefits to be paid and provide all the information reasonably necessary for the payment of such benefits. However, if a participant files a claim for benefits with the plan administrator and provides the plan administrator with all the information necessary for the payment of benefits but does not indicate a preference as to the form for the payment of benefits, benefits must be paid in the form of a qualified joint and survivor annuity if the participant has attained the qualified early retirement age unless such participant has made an effective election not to receive benefits in such form. For rules

relating to provisions in a plan to the effect that a claim for benefits must be filed before the payment of benefits will commence, see § 1.401(a)-14.

(3) *Marriage requirements.* A plan may provide that a joint and survivor annuity will be paid only if—

(i) The participant and his spouse have been married to each other throughout a period (not exceeding one year) ending on the annuity starting date.

(ii) The spouse of the participant is not entitled to receive a survivor annuity (whether or not the election described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section has been made) unless the participant and his spouse have been married to each other throughout a period (not exceeding one year) ending on the date of such participant's death.

(iii) The same spouse must satisfy the requirements of subdivisions (i) and (ii) of this subparagraph.

(iv) The participant must notify the plan administrator (as defined by section 414(g)) of his marital status within any reasonable time period specified in the plan.

(4) *Effect of participant's death on an election or revocation of an election under paragraph (c).* A plan may provide that any election described in paragraph (c) of this section or any revocation of any such election does not become effective or ceases to be effective if the participant dies within a period, not in excess of 2 years, beginning on the date of such election or revocation. However, a plan containing a provision described in the preceding sentence shall not satisfy the requirements of this section unless it also provides that any such election or any revocation of any such election will be given effect in any case in which—

(i) The participant dies from accidental causes,

(ii) A failure to give effect to the election or revocation would deprive the participant's survivor of a survivor annuity, and

(iii) Such election or revocation is made before such accident occurred.

(5) *Benefit option approval by third party.* (i) A plan may provide that an optional form of benefit elected by a participant is subject to the approval of an administrative committee or

similar third party. However, the administrative committee cannot deny a participant any of the benefits required by section 401(a)(11). For example, if a plan offers a life annuity option, the committee may deny the participant a qualified joint and survivor annuity only by denying the participant access to all life annuity options without knowledge of whether the participant wishes to receive a qualified joint and survivor annuity. Alternatively, if the committee knows which form of life annuity the participant has chosen before the committee makes its decision, the committee cannot withhold its consent for payment of a qualified joint and survivor annuity event though it denies all other life annuity options. This subparagraph (5) only applies before the effective date of the amendment made to section 411(d)(6) by section 301 of the Retirement Equity Act of 1984. See section 411(d)(6) and the regulations thereunder for rules limiting employer discretion.

(ii) The provisions of this subparagraph may be illustrated by the following example:

*Example.* In 1980 plan M provides that the automatic form of benefit is a single sum distribution. The plan also permits, subject to approval by the administrative committee, the election of several optional forms of life annuity. On the election form that is reviewed by the administrative committee the participant indicates whether any life annuity option is preferred, without indicating the particular life annuity chosen. Thus, the committee approves or disapproves the election without knowledge of whether a qualified joint and survivor annuity will be elected. The administrative committee approval provision in Plan M does not cause the plan to fail to satisfy this section. On the other hand, if the form indicates which form of life annuity is preferred, committee disapproval of any election of the qualified joint and survivor annuity would cause the plan to fail to satisfy this section.

(e) *Costs of providing qualified joint and survivor annuity form or early survivor annuity form.* A plan may take into account in any equitable manner consistent with generally accepted actuarial principles applied on a consistent basis any increased costs resulting from providing qualified joint and survivor annuity and early survivor annuity benefits. A plan may give a participant the option of paying

premiums only if it provides another option under which an out-of-pocket expense by the participant is not required.

(f) *Application and effective date.* Section 401(a)(11) and this section shall apply to a plan only with respect to plan years beginning after December 31, 1975, and shall apply only if—

(1) The participant's annuity starting date did not fall within a plan year beginning before January 1, 1976, and

(2) The participant was an active participant in the plan on or after the first day of the first plan year beginning after December 31, 1975.

For purposes of this paragraph, the term "active participant" means a participant for whom benefits are being accrued under the plan on his behalf (in the case of a defined benefit plan), the employer is obligated to contribute to or under the plan on his behalf (in the case of a defined contribution plan other than a profit-sharing plan), or the employer either is obligated to contribute to or under the plan on his behalf or would have been obligated to contribute to or under the plan on his behalf if any contribution were made to or under the plan (in the case of a profit-sharing plan).

If benefits under a plan are provided by the distribution to the participants of individual annuity contracts, the annuity starting date will be considered for purposes of this paragraph to fall within a plan year beginning before January 1, 1976, with respect to any such individual contract that was distributed to the participant during a plan year beginning before January 1, 1976, if no premiums are paid with respect to such contract during a plan year beginning after December 31, 1975. In the case of individual annuity contracts that are distributed to participants before January 1, 1978, and which contain an option to provide a qualified joint and survivor annuity, the requirements of this section will be considered to have been satisfied if, not later than January 1, 1978, holders of individual annuity contracts who are participants described in the first sentence of this paragraph are given an opportunity to have such contracts amended, so as to provide for a qualified joint and survivor annuity in the absence of a con-

trary election, within a period of not less than one year from the date such opportunity was offered. In no event, however, shall the preceding sentence apply with respect to benefits attributable to premiums paid after December 31, 1977.

(g) *Effect of REA 1984—(1) In general.* The Retirement Equity Act of 1984 (REA 1984) significantly changed the qualified joint and survivor annuity rules generally effective for plan years beginning after December 31, 1984. The new survivor annuity rules are primarily in sections 401(a)(11) and 417 as revised by REA 1984 and §§1.401(a)-20 and 417(e)-1.

(2) *Regulations after REA 1984.* (i) REA and the regulations thereunder to the extent inconsistent with pre-REA 1984 section 401(a)(11) and this section are controlling for years to which REA 1984 applies. See e.g., paragraphs (a)(1) and (2) of this section, relating to required provisions and certain cash-outs, respectively and (e), relating to costs of providing annuities, for rules that are inconsistent with REA 1984 and, therefore, are not applicable to REA 1984 years.

(ii) To the extent that the pre-REA 1984 law either is the same as or consistent with REA 1984 and the new regulations hereunder, the rules in this section shall continue to apply for years to which REA 1984 applies. (See, e.g., paragraph (c) (relating to how information is furnished participants and spouses) and paragraph (b) (defining a life annuity) for some of the rules that apply to REA 1984 years.) The rules in this section shall not apply for such years to the extent that they are inconsistent with REA 1984 and the regulations thereunder.

(iii) The Commissioner may provide additional guidance as to the continuing effect of the various rules in this section for years to which REA 1984 applies.

(Secs. 401(a)(11), 7805 Internal Revenue Code of 1954, (88 Stat. 935, 68A Stat. 917; (26 U.S.C. 401(a)(11), 7805)))

[T.D. 7458, 42 FR 1466, Jan. 7, 1977; 42 FR 6367, Feb. 2, 1977; T.D. 7510, 42 FR 53956, Oct. 4, 1977; T.D. 8219, 53 FR 31841, Aug. 22, 1988; 53 FR 48534, Dec. 1, 1988; T.D. 9099, 68 FR 70144, as amended by, Dec. 17, 2003]